

Nathanael O'Reilly

Breaking Surf

For Greg Conlan (1974-2004)

You knocked on the window
Of the room where I slept
During holidays at my grandparents'
And gestured for me to meet you
At the backdoor. It was barely light.

The surf was up at the East Beach
And sets of crystal tubes were rolling in.
There was no time to lose.
I pulled on my boardies and t-shirt,
Threw a beach-towel 'round my neck,

Slipped my feet into a pair of thongs.
I climbed a step-ladder in the garage
And eased my uncle's custom board
Down from its home in the rafters,
Stuffed a wetsuit inside the cover.

With surfboards gripped under arms,
We peddled our bikes stealthily
Through the sleeping town, across
The Moyne, uphill to the carpark
Beside the Surf Lifesaving Club.

We dropped our bikes against the fence,
Raced down the path onto the sand,
Tore the covers from our boards,
Hastily circled wax, impatiently tugged
On wetsuits and ran whooping,

High-stepping, splashing
Into the breaking surf.